**Course of Study: Creative Writing** **Grade Levels: 9-12**
**Instructional Block/Theme: Poetry**

# *International Education: THE ART OF TRANSLATION TRANSLATING CHINESE POETRY INTO ENGLISH*

This lesson is constructed to take two to four days depending on the number of activities chosen and the length of the class periods.

## I. Content:

I want students to understand (or be able to):

A. Understand the process of how a poem is translated from one language to another
B. Understand how the study of translation reveals other cultures
C. Examine the function of images through interpretation and translation

## II. Prerequisites:

In order to fully appreciate this lesson, students must know/be experienced in:

A. The concept and use of imagery in poetry
B. Elements of poetry: symbolism, parallel structure, rhyme, line breaks, etc.
C. Some study of Japanese/Chinese forms of poetry such as haiku or tanka (World Literature)
D. The Imagist movement (American Literature)

## III. Instructional Objective:

The students will:

A. Examine the relationship between several Chinese characters and their respective meanings
B. Explore Chinese thought and culture through an introductory study of Chinese language
C. Translate poems from Chinese into English
D. Compare the validity of poem translations
E. Demonstrate an understanding of literary translation

## IV. Materials and Equipment

*Teacher:*

**Teacher Handout #1:** "Chinese Characters and Their Meaning" from *What's in a Chinese Character*

**Teacher Handout #2:** "On Translation and Translating Wang Wei"

**Teacher Handout #3:** Chinese Poems translated by Greg Whincup, from *The Heart of Chinese Poetry*

**Teacher Handout #4:** "The Chinese Text of a Poem by Wang Wei" from *19 Ways of Translating Wang Wei* by Eliot Weinberger and Octavio Paz.

**Teacher Handout #5:** Character-by-Character Translation

**Teacher Handout #6:** Questions to evaluate a translation and for discussion

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**Teacher Handout #7:** "The Form of the Deer" tr. By W.J.B. Fletcher and "Empty Mountains" tr. By Gary Snyder from *The Heart of Chinese Poetry*

*Student:* Students will use the **Teacher Handouts** listed above

## V. Instructional Procedure:

A. The teacher will hand out "Chinese Characters and Their Meanings"(**Teacher Handout 1**). Discuss how Chinese ideographs and pictographs reflect abstract concepts and literal meanings, respectively.

B. The teacher will read "On Translation" to introduce Chinese poetry and translation (**Teacher Handout 2**). Teacher will hand out and read two poems translated from Chinese by Greg Whincup with commentary (**Teacher Handout 3**).

C. The teacher will handout "The Chinese Text of a Poem by Wang Wei" with commentary (**Teacher Handout 4**). Have students identify Chinese characters that they recognize from their brief introduction to Chinese. Read the background on Wang Wei and on classical Chinese language.

D. Teacher will hand out "A Literal Interpretation of Wang Wei" (**Teacher Handout 5**). Students will read through the literal translation. Discuss how the literal interpretation does not translate fluently into English.

E. Students individually translate the poem into English making the literal interpretation more fluent.

F. Divide students into groups of four. Have each student read his/her poem to the group.

G. Using the questions on **Teacher Handout 6** as a guideline, have students evaluate each translation.

H. Students then work together in their groups to determine the "best" translation, the poem that best maintains the voice and meaning of the original poem. Each group writes their version on the board. Discuss the differences in interpretation.

I. Ask students for general responses to the difficulties encountered in translating and discuss: What decisions/interpretations must a translator make?

J. Hand out the translations by Fletcher and Gary Snyder (**Teacher Handout 7**). Translations may be used with or without the included commentary by Weinberger.

K. Discuss the differences. Using the questions on **Teacher Handout 5**, students write a one page essay explaining which translation is most valid.

L. For discussion: What new understandings can be learned when we see poetry through the bilingual lens of translation?

# *International Education: THE ART OF TRANSLATION TRANSLATING CHINESE POETRY INTO ENGLISH*

## VI. Assessment/Evaluation:

A. Poems translated from Chinese into English.
B. Analysis of translation accuracy using questions evaluating the translation.
C. Essay

## VII. Idaho Achievement Standards:

| | |
|---|---|
| 9.LA.2.3.4 | Explain the author's point of view and interpret how it influences the text. |
| 9.LA.2.3.7 | Compare and contrast authors' style on the basis of such elements as word choice and sentence complexity |
| 10.LA.2.3.1 | Read and respond to literature from a variety of genres |
| 10.LA.2.3.3 | Explain the author's point of view and interpret how it influences the text. |
| 10.LA.2.3.5 | Analyze ways in which authors use imagery, figures of speech, and the "sound" of language for effect. (752.02.a; 752.02.d) |
| 10.LA.2.3.6 | Compare and contrast authors' styles on the basis of such elements as word choice and sentence syntax. (752.01.g) |
| 11.LA.2.3.3 | Analyze the ways in which the theme represents a view or comment on life, using textual evidence to support the claim. (752.02) |
| 11.LA.2.3.4 | Evaluate the significance of various literary devices, including irony, tone, and figurative language. (752.01.g; 752.02.d) |
| 12.LA.2.1.1 | Compare and contrast similar themes or topics by authors from different time periods or cultures to explain how the historical or cultural context shapes each author's point of view. |
| 12.LA.2.3.1 | Analyze recognized works of literature representing a variety of genres and traditions that: (752.02.a)<br>Trace the development of the major periods of British or World literature.<br>Contrast the major themes, styles, and trends in different periods.<br>Evaluate the influences (i.e., philosophical, political, religious, ethical, and social) of the historical period that shaped the characters, plot, and setting. |
| 12.LA.2.3.3 | Evaluate the ways in which the theme represents a view or comment on life, using textual evidence to support the claim. (752.02) |
| 12.LA.2.3.4 | Analyze the ways in which irony, tone, mood, symbolism, and the "sound" of language achieve specific rhetorical or aesthetic purposes. (752.02 |

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12.LA.2.3.5 Evaluate the aesthetic qualities of style, including the impact of diction and figurative language, on tone, mood, and theme. (752.01.g; 752.02.d)

**VIII. Follow up Activities:**

A. Students write a poem using images from nature that evoke an emotion.
   1. Use Ezra Pound's poem "The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter" found in most textbooks as a model of a poem that shows how the speaker feels without naming the emotion.
   2. Students brainstorm a list of emotions.
   3. Students choose one emotion, and brainstorm phenomena in nature that could effectively convey the emotion.
   4. Students write a poem using images from nature. Emotions cannot be named or described in the poem; the images must carry the emotion. Remind students of the "show, don't tell" technique.

B. Have students study Ezra Pound's essay "A Few Don't's by an Imagiste" and relate it to Chinese poetry.

C. Translate further poems from Chinese using Greg Whincup's book *The Heart of Chinese Poetry*.

D. Study simple Chinese characters and their meaning using a book such as *What's in a Chinese Character*? by Tan Huay Peng.

E. Have students research the Imagists and report on how Chinese and Japanese poetry influenced the Imagist movement and poets such as Ezra Pound and Wallace Stevens.

F. For Spanish speaking ESL students, include Octavio Paz's translation of "Deer Park" in Spanish and have students compare his translation with English translations. The translation is found in *19 Ways of Translating Wang Wei* by Eliot Weinberger and Octavio Paz.

G. Research the historical/cultural context of a Chinese poem or the works of a famous Chinese poet such as: Li Bai (Li Po), Du Fu (Tu Fu), or Wang Wei.

# CHINESE CHARACTERS AND THEIR MEANING

PAGE 1

## 人 rén

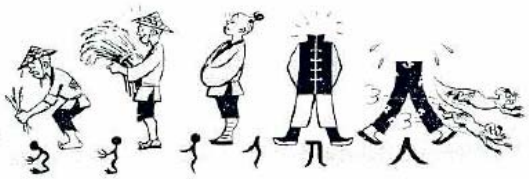
man; person; human

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 人才 | rén cái | man of talent |
| 人格 | rén gé | personality |
| 人口 | rén kǒu | population |
| 人类 | rén lèi | mankind |
| 人民 | rén mín | people |
| 人生 | rén shēng | the life of man |
| 人为 | rén wéi | man-made |

人：象形字"人"所呈现出的是人体的侧面形态。从"人"字的演变中我们可以看出人进化的痕迹。自从诞生于这个世界，具备了手脚之后，原始人不得不通过徒手耕种（ ）来维持生存。这就促使其直立行走（ ）。在脱离了靠手脚的体力劳动后，人类开始只进行脑力劳动（ ）。今天，人类在激烈的竞争中人连头都丢了，甚至于连脚跟也立不稳了（ ）。

The pictographic profile of a person（人）presents an insight into his evolutionary development. Created from earth and equipped with hands and feet, lowly man eked out an existence from the ground with his hands to help him stand on his feet . Discarding both hands and feet, he used only his head . Today, in the race of the survival of the fittest, he loses his head completely and finds himself barely able to keep his feet.

丿 人



## 山 shān

mountain; hill

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 山顶 | shān dǐng | mountain top |
| 山歌 | shān gē | folk song |
| 山谷 | shān gǔ | valley |
| 山脉 | shān mài | mountain range |
| 山坡 | shān pō | hill slope |
| 山头 | shān tóu | hilltop |
| 山崖 | shān yá | cliff |

山：一座有三个高峰的山脉，提供了表示山脉或山坡的象形文字"山"的雏形。从一个至高点，人们可以轻易地看到低谷中容易被忽视的事物。正如谚语中所说的："不登高山，不知天下之大也。"

A mountain range, with three towering peaks, provides the structure for this pictograph of mountain or hill: 山. From a high point of vantage, man is able to oversee what is easily overlooked on a lowland. Hence the proverb: "If you don't climb the high mountain, you can't view the plain."

丨 山 山

# CHINESE CHARACTERS AND THEIR MEANING

PAGE 2

## 目 mù

eye

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 目标 | mù biāo | aim |
| 目的 | mù dì | purpose; aim; goal |
| 目光 | mù guāng | sight; vision; view |
| 目见 | mù jiàn | see for oneself |
| 目力 | mù lì | eyesight |
| 目前 | mù qián | at present |
| 目送 | mù sòng | watch somebody go |

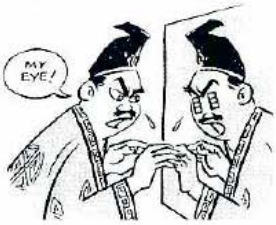
目：“目”字最早是由“眼皮”和“眼珠”两部分组成的“  ”。后写作“  ”因它容易与“  ”字混淆，所以人们把它竖起来变成“”，并最终定形为“”。一个人就是眼力再好，也不能用一只眼睛看到另一只眼睛。

In its primitive form the eye was pictured naturally with eyelids and pupil . When stylised:  its similarity to  (four) deceived man's eye; so it was stood on end:  and finally squared off:  . It would seem that even with his very own eyes man could not see eye to eye.











## 林 lín

forest

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 艺林 | yì lín | art circles |
| 竹林 | zhú lín | bamboo grove |
| 林产品 | lín chǎn pǐn | forest products |
| 林带 | lín dài | forest belt |
| 林立 | lín lì | stand in great numbers (like trees in a forest) |
| 林木 | lín mù | forest; woods |

林：按照谚语所说：“无丝不成线，无树不成林”。代表树的“木”字为象形字。两个“木”字意为树丛或树林。三个“木”字组合在一起，即为“森”，指代的是茂密生长的树林。

“A single fibre does not make a thread; a single tree does not make a forest,” so goes the saying. The character for tree is a pictograph: 木. Two trees form a company - a grove or forest: 林. Three trees make a crowd, signifying dense or overgrown: 森.

## On Translation and Translating Wang Wei

**"Poetry is that which is worth translating.**

**For example, this four-line poem [see attached poem], 1200 years old: a mountain, a forest, the setting sun illuminating a patch of moss. It is a scrap of literary Chinese, no longer spoken as its writer spoke it. It is a thing, forever itself, inseparable from its language.**

**And yet something about it has caused it to lead a nomadic life: insinuating itself in the minds of readers, demanding understanding (but on the reader's own terms), provoking thought, sometimes compelling writing in other languages. Great poetry lives in a state of perpetual transformation, perpetual translation: the poem dies when it has no place to go.**

**The transformations that take shape in print, that take the formal name of" translation," become their own beings, set out on their own wanderings. Some live long, and some don't. What kind of creatures are they? What happens when a poem, once Chinese and Still Chinese, becomes a piece of English, Spanish, French poetry?"**

**--Eliot Weinberger**
**19 Ways of Looking at Wang Wei**

Translation is an art. Arguably, translation is also the simultaneous art of something lost and something found. While the translator maintains the original text as much as possible, some characteristics of the poetry will be lost-- in rhythm, in rhyme, in structure, or even in meaning. The thrill of translation is nurturing the soul of the poem to thrive in the light of a new language.

A translator works with two texts: the source text and the new text, the translation. A translator goes beyond imitation, beyond a mirror image of what is in the original text, to excavate and reveal the original text's complexity in voice, style and form.

The historical/cultural context of a poem becomes of utmost importance. As Octavio Paz writes of Wang Wei's four-line poem: "The translation of this poem is particularly difficult, for the poem carries to an extreme the characteristics of Chinese poetry: universality, impersonality, absence of time, absence of subject. In Wang Wei's poem, the solitude of the mountain is so great that not even the poet himself is present." Translation is not easy.

### Images and Chinese Poetry

Chinese poetry can be challenging for Western students to translate because there are few transitions between images. Greg Whincup writes in *The Heart of Chinese Poetry*,

"The images are strung like jewels," which is a beautiful thing, but Western students must wrestle with the historical /cultural context of Chinese poetry to get at the meaning.

Translating Chinese poetry, students learn the history and culture behind the poems. Because Chinese poem string images "like jewels," the translator's eye and heart relies on the images. As one translator put it, "The lack of ligaments between the characters compels the student to do the work of relation." The translator finds a way to link the images with meaning.

Chinese poetry influenced the Imagist movement in America, writers such as Ezra Pound who focused on the use of images in their poetry. Ezra Pound wrote, "It is better to present one image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works." An important characteristic to good writing is tightened writing. A study of images focuses the writer's eye on word choice. Pound continued, "use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something," This is especially true in poetry.

John Oliver Simon and Michael P. Ray, who work with the Center for the Art of Translation, recognize both the difficulty and the potential for creative interpretation posed by translating Chinese. Chinese presents both a challenge and an invitation: Simon and Ray write, **"There are not words in Chinese that sound the same as in English, they are not expressed in a phonetic alphabet, and Chinese omits such 'conveniences' as pronouns, tenses, and articles. It is the context of the poem that anchors the verbs, not a word like 'he' or 'she.' This means that the initial comprehension and the fleshing out of historical context and cultural cues are critically important in helping students create a valid translation. On the other hand, the ambiguity of Chinese leaves room for a great variety of strong English versions."**

## 1. *Question and Answer in the Mountains*

Ask me
Why I stay
On Green Mountain?
I smile
And do not answer,
My heart is at ease.

Peach blossoms
On flowing water
Slip away
Into the distance—
This is another world
Which is not of men.

Li Bai 李白
Tang Dynasty
About 730 A.D.

山 *Mountains* 問 *Ask*
中 *-amid* 答 *Answer*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | wèn | 問 | ASK |
| | yú | 余 | ME |
| | hé | 何 | WHAT |
| | yì | 意 | IDEA |
| | chī | 棲 | ROOST |
| | Bì | 碧 | GREEN |
| | *Shān* | 山 | MOUNTAIN? |
| 2 | syàu | 笑 | SMILE |
| | ér | 而 | AND |
| | bù | 不 | NOT |
| | dá | 答 | REPLY, |
| | syīn | 心 | HEART |
| | dz̀ | 自 | OF ITSELF |
| | *syén* | 閑 | AT EASE |
| 3 | táu | 桃 | PEACH |
| | hwā | 花 | BLOSSOM |
| | lyóu | 流 | FLOWING |
| | shwěi | 水 | WATER, |
| | yǎu | 窅 | DISTANT- |
| | rán | 然 | -LY |
| | chyù | 去 | GOES |
| 4 | byé | 別 | ANOTHER |
| | yǒu | 有 | THERE IS |
| | tyēn | 天 | HEAVEN |
| | dì | 地 | EARTH, |
| | fēi | 非 | NOT |

Chinese poems are like strings of jewels.

The jewels are Chinese characters, each of which represents a one-syllable word.

These little word-jewels are hard and unchanging, but when they are translated into English, each one seems to have several different meanings.

The word 山 *shan*, for example, can mean "mountain" or "mountains."

The word 笑 *syau* can mean "a smile," "smiling" or "to smile."

In fact, 山 and 笑 do not really have more than one meaning. It is just that their meaning is broader than any one English word.

The heart of the jewel never changes, but its surface reflects the light in many different ways.

Li Bai (701–762 A.D.) was the most sublimely talented of all Chinese poets. He was like



| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | rén | 人 | PEOPLE |
| | *jyēn* | 間 | AMONG |

a god, or a force of nature.

He accepted no restrictions in his life, but floated through China making poetry and spending time with nature and his friends.

When he wrote this poem he was living in the hills of central China, in a place he compares to the mythical earthly paradise, PEACH BLOSSOM SPRING 桃花源.

Words which rhyme are *italicized* in the pronunciation column at the left-hand side of the page.

## 3
## (character-by-character translation)

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Empty | mountain(s) | (negative) | to see | person |
| | hill(s) | | | people |
| But | to hear | person | words | sound |
| | | people | conversation | to echo |
| To return | bright(ness) | to enter | deep | forest |
| | shadow(s)* | | | |
| To return | to shine | green | moss | above |
| Again | to reflect | blue | lichen | on (top of) |
| | | black | | top |

* According to François Cheng, *returning shadows* is a trope meaning *rays of sunset*.



I have presented only those definitions that are possible for this text. There are others.

A single character may be noun, verb, and adjective. It may even have contradictory readings: character 2 of line 3 is either *jing* (brightness) or *ying* (shadow). Again, context is all. Of particular difficulty to the Western translator is the absence of tense in Chinese verbs: in the poem, what is happening has happened and will happen. Similarly, nouns have no number: rose is a rose is all roses.

Contrary to the evidence of most translations, the first-person singular rarely appears in Chinese poetry. By eliminating the controlling individual mind of the poet, the experience becomes both universal and immediate to the reader.

The title of the poem, *Lu zhai*, is a place-name, something like *Deer Grove*, which I take from a map of Illinois. It probably alludes to the Deer Park in Sarnath, where the Gautama Buddha preached his first sermon.

The first two lines are fairly straightforward. The second couplet has, as we shall see, quite a few possible readings, all of them equally "correct."

# THE CHINESE TEXT OF A POEM BY WANG WEI

1

(text)

空山不見人，
但聞人語響；
返景入深林，
復照青苔上。

2

The poem is by Wang Wei (c. 700–761), known in his lifetime as a wealthy Buddhist painter and calligrapher, and to later generations as a master poet in an age of masters, the Tang Dynasty. The quatrain is from a series of twenty poems on various sights near the Wang (no relation) River. The poems were written as part of a massive horizontal landscape scroll, a genre he invented. The painting was copied (translated) for centuries. The original is lost, and the earliest surviving copy comes from the 17th century. Wang's landscape after 900 years of transformation.

In classical Chinese, each character (ideogram) represents a word of a single syllable. Few of the characters are, as is commonly thought, entirely representational. But some of the basic vocabulary is indeed pictographic, and with those few hundred characters one can play the game of pretending to read Chinese.

Reading the poem left to right, top to bottom, the second character in line 1 is apparently a *mountain*; the last character in the same line a *person*—both are stylizations that evolved from more literal representations. Character 4 in line 1 was a favorite of Ezra Pound's, what he interpreted as an eye on legs; that is, the eye in motion, *to see*. Character 5 in line 3 is two trees, *forest*. Spatial relationships are concretely portrayed in character 3 of line 3, *to enter*, and character 5 of line 4, *above or on top of*.

More typical of Chinese is character 2 of line 4, *to shine*, which contains an image of the sun in the upper left and of fire at the bottom, as well as a purely phonetic element—key to the word's pronunciation—in the upper right. Most of the other characters have no pictorial content useful for decipherment.

3

# 9. *Seeing Off a Friend*

Green mountains
Lie across the northern outskirts
Of the city.
White water
Winds around the eastern
City wall.

Once we make our parting
Here in this place,
Like a solitary tumbleweed
You will go
Ten thousand miles.

Floating clouds
Are the thoughts of the wanderer.
Setting sun
Is the mood of his old friend.

With a wave of the hand
Now you go from here.
Your horse gives a whinny
As it departs.

Li Bai 李白
Tang Dynasty
About 750 A.D.



1 chīng 青 GREEN
shān 山 MOUNTAINS
héng 橫 LIE ACROSS
běi 北 NORTHERN
gwō 郭 OUTSKIRTS

2 bái 白 WHITE
shwěi 水 WATER
rǎu 繞 WINDS AROUND
dūng 東 EASTERN
*chéng* 城 CITY WALL

3 tsž 此 THIS
dì 地 GROUND,
yī 一 ONCE
wéi 爲 MAKE
byé 別 PARTING

4 gū 孤 SOLITARY
péng 蓬 TUMBLEWEED
wàn 萬 TEN THOUSAND
lǐ 里 MILES
*jēng* 征 MARCH

5 fú 浮 FLOATING
yún 雲 CLOUDS,
yóu 游 WANDER-
dž 子 -ER'S
yì 意 THOUGHTS

## 送 *Seeing Off a Friend-Person*

The years from about 700 to 750 A.D. were the golden age of Chinese poetry. China's two greatest poets—Li Bai and Du Fu—shone brightest in a constellation of poetic stars.

By 700 A.D., northern and southern China had been reunited under the Tang Dynasty for about a century. Their union now gave birth to a culture with the martial strength of the north and the elegance of the south.

Some of the robust clarity of the verse of this "High Tang" period comes from its use of parallelism. Notice how each word in line 1 has an exact parallel in line 2:

GREEN // WHITE
MOUNTAINS // WATER
LIE ACROSS // WINDS AROUND
NORTHERN // EASTERN
OUTSKIRTS // CITY WALL

In almost all Chinese poetry, each pair of lines is a separate unit, almost like a stanza. Pairs that are parallel gain an emphasis that makes them the

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | lwò | 落 | FALLING |
| | ì | 日 | SUN, |
| | gù | 故 | OLD |
| | rén | 人 | FRIEND'S |
| | *ching* | 情 | FEELINGS |
| 7 | hwēi | 揮 | WAVE |
| | shǒu | 手 | HAND, |
| | dż | 自 | FROM |
| | dz̄ | 茲 | THIS |
| | chyù | 去 | GO |
| 8 | syāu | 蕭 | SYAU |
| | syāu | 蕭 | SYAU, |
| | bān | 班 | SEPARATED |
| | mǎ | 馬 | HORSE |
| | *míng* | 鳴 | CRIES |

solid pegs on which the rest of the poem hangs.

Here, lines 1–2 are parallel, lines 3–4 are not. Lines 5–6 again are parallel, lines 7–8 are not.

The strong, emotion-laden images of the parallel lines 5–6 (FLOATING CLOUDS, FALLING SUN) are the heart of the poem. Lines 7–8 trail away to the final parting.

TEN THOUSAND MILES 萬里 (line 4) is poetic overstatement. In any case, the old Chinese "mile" or *li* 里 was equal to only one-third of a standard mile, or half a kilometer.

OLD FRIEND (line 6) is literally "old person" 故人 .This is "old" in the sense not of "aged," but rather "of long standing."



# 10. *Southern Spring*

A thousand miles
Of caroling warblers,
Flowers that flash red
Against the green.
Villages by the water
And walled mountain-towns,
Wine-shop banners in the breeze.

Four hundred eighty
Temples of the Southern Dynasties:
How many high buildings
In the mist and rain?

Du Mu 杜牧
Tang Dynasty
About 830 A.D.

## Evaluating a Translation

1) Does the translation maintain the ideas of the original work?

2) Is the style and manner of writing of the same character as that of the original?

3) Is the translation smooth, i.e. does the poem read fluently? Or does it feel forced? Does it have a natural and easy form of expression?

4) Does the translation produce a similar response in the reader? If not, what is lost in translation?

# 4
# The Form of the Deer

So lone seem the hills; there is no one in sight there.

But whence is the echo of voices I hear?

The rays of the sunset pierce slanting the forest,

And in their reflection green mosses appear.

—W.J.B. Fletcher, 1919



The translation is typical of those written before the general recognition of Ezra Pound's *Cathay*, first published in 1915. Pound's small book, containing some of the most beautiful poems in the English language, was based on a notebook of literal Chinese translations prepared by the orientalist Ernest Fenollosa and a Japanese informant. The "accuracy" of Pound's versions remains a sore point: pedants still snort at the errors, but Wai-lim Yip has demonstrated that Pound, who at the time knew no Chinese, *intuitively* corrected mistakes in the Fenollosa manuscript. Regardless of its scholarly worth, *Cathay* marked, in T.S. Eliot's words, "the invention of Chinese poetry in our time." Rather than stuffing the original into the corset of traditional verse forms, as Fletcher and many others had done, Pound created a new poetry in English drawn from what was unique to the Chinese.

"Every force," said Mother Ann Lee of the Shakers, "evolves a form." Pound's genius was the discovery of the living matter, the force, of the Chinese poem—what he called the "news that stays news" through the centuries. This living matter functions somewhat like DNA, spinning out individual translations which are relatives, not clones, of the original. The relationship between original and translation is parent-child. And there are, inescapably, some translations that are overly attached to their originals, and others that are constantly rebelling.

Fletcher, like all early (and many later) translators, feels he must explain and "improve" the original poem. Where Wang's sunlight *enters* the forest, Fletcher's rays *pierce slanting*; where Wang states simply that voices are heard, Fletcher invents a first-person narrator who asks where the sounds are coming from. (And if the hills are *there*, where is the narrator?)

In line 4, ambiguity has been translated into confusion: Fletcher's line has no meaning. (What reflection where?) Or perhaps the line has a lovely and unlikely Platonic subtlety: if *their* refers to the mosses, then what *appears* is the reflection of moss itself.

Fletcher explains his curious (and equally Platonic) title with a note that *zhai* means "the place where the deer sleeps, its 'form'."

## 19

Empty mountains:

no one to be seen.

Yet—hear—

human sounds and echoes.

Returning sunlight

enters the dark woods;

Again shining

on the green moss, above.

—Gary Snyder, 1978



Surely one of the best translations, partially because of Snyder's lifelong forest experience. Like Rexroth, he can *see* the scene. Every word of Wang has been translated, and nothing added, yet the translation exists as an American poem.

Changing the passive *is heard* to the imperative *hear* is particularly beautiful, and not incorrect: it creates an exact moment, which is now. Giving us both meanings, *sounds and echoes*, for the last word of line 2 is, like most sensible ideas, revolutionary. Translators always assume that only one reading of a foreign word or phrase may be presented, despite the fact that perfect correspondence is rare.

The poem ends strangely. Snyder takes the last word, which everyone else has read as *on*, and translates it with its alternative meaning, *above*, isolating it from the phrase with a comma. What's going on? Moss presumably is only above if one is a rock or bug. Or are we meant to look up, after seeing the moss, back toward the sun: the vertical metaphor of enlightenment?

In answer to my query, Snyder wrote: "The reason for '... moss, above' ... is that the sun is entering (in its sunset sloping, hence 'again'—a final shaft) the woods, and illuminating some moss *up in the trees*. (NOT ON ROCKS.) This is how my teacher Ch'en Shih-hsiang saw it, and my wife (Japanese) too, the first time she looked at the poem."

The point is that translation is more than a leap from dictionary to dictionary; it is a reimagining of the poem. As such, every reading of every poem, regardless of language, is an act of translation: translation into the reader's intellectual and emotional life. As no individual reader remains the same, each reading becomes a different—not merely another—reading. The same poem cannot be read twice.

Snyder's explanation is only one moment, the latest, when the poem suddenly transforms before our eyes. Wang's 20 characters remain the same, but the poem continues in a state of restless change.